**Theodore Dwight Weld’s American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses**

As slaveholders and their apologists are volunteer witnesses in their own cause, and are flooding the world with testimony that their slaves are kindly treated; that they are well fed, well clothed, well housed, well lodged, moderately worked, and bountifully provided with all things needful for their comfort, we propose--first, to disprove their assertions by the testimony of a multitude of impartial witnesses, and then to put slaveholders themselves through a course of cross-questioning which shall draw their condemnation out of their own mouths. We will prove that the slaves in the United States are treated with barbarous inhumanity; that they are overworked, underfed, wretchedly clad and lodged, and have insufficient sleep; that they are often made to wear round their necks iron collars armed with prongs, to drag heavy chains and weights at their feet while working in the field, and to wear yokes, and bells, and iron horns; that they are often kept confined in the stocks day and night for weeks together, made to wear gags in their mouths for hours or days, have some of their front teeth torn out or broken off, that they may be easily detected when they run away; that they are frequently flogged with terrible severity, have red pepper rubbed into their lacerated flesh, and hot brine, spirits of turpentine, &c., poured over the gashes to increase the torture; that they are often stripped naked, their backs and limbs cut with knives, bruised and mangled by scores and hundreds of blows with the paddle, and terribly torn by the claws of cats, drawn over them by their tormentors; that they are often hunted with blood hounds and shot down like beasts, or torn in pieces by dogs; that they are often suspended by the arms and whipped and beaten till they faint, and when revived by restoratives, beaten again till they faint, and sometimes till they die; that their ears are often cut off, their eyes knocked out, their bones broken, their flesh branded with red hot irons; that they are maimed, mutilated and burned to death over slow fires. All these things, and more, and worse, we shall *prove.* Reader, we know whereof we affirm, we have weighed it well; *more and worse* WE WILL PROVE.

1. According to Weld, what do slave owners claim about the way that they treat slaves?

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1. What is the **reality** of the way that slave owners treat slaves?

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1. What punishments do slaves receive according to Weld?

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1. How did you feel when you finished reading this passage?

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These two, whom we shall call Susan and Emmeline, had been the personal attendants of an amiable and pious lady of New Orleans, by whom they had been carefully and piously instructed and trained. They had been taught to read and write, diligently instructed in the truths of religion, and their lot had always been as happy an one as in their condition it was possible to be. But the only son of their protectress had the management of her property; an, by carelessness and extravagance, involved it to a large amount, and at last failed...

Susan and Emmeline were sent to the depot to await a general auction on the following morning; and as they glimmer faintly upon us in the moonlight which steals through the grated window, we may listen to their conversation. Both are weeping, but each quietly, that the other may not hear.

"Mother, just lay your head on my lap, and see if you canít sleep a little," says the girl, trying to appear calm.

"I havenít any heart to sleep, Em; I canít; itís the last night we may be together!"

"Oh, mother, donít say so! Perhaps we shall get sold together ­ who knows?"

"If it was anybodyís else case, I should say so, too, Em," said the woman; "But Iím so ëfeared of losiní you that Ii donít see anything but the danger."

"Why, mother, the man said we were both likely, and would sell well."

Susan remembered the manís looks and words. With a deadly sickness at her heart, she remembered how he had looked at Emmelineís hands, and lifted up her curly hair, and pronounced her a first-rate article. Susan had been trained as a Christian, brought up in the daily reading of the Bible, and had the same horror of her childís being sold to a life of shame that any other Christian mother might have; but she had no hope ­ no protection.

"Mother, I think we might do first-rate, if you could get a place as a cook, and I as chambermaid or seamstress, in some family. I dare say we shall. Letís both look as bright and lively as we can, and tell all we can do, and perhaps we shall," said Emmeline.

"I want you to brush your hair all back straight, to-morrow," said Susan.

"What for, mother? I donít look near so well that way."

"Yes, but youíll sell better so."

"I donít see why!" said the child.

"Respectable families would be more apt to buy you, if they say you looked plain and decent, as if you wasnít trying to look handsome. I know their ways betterín you do," said Susan.

"Well, mother, then I will."

"And Emmeline, if we shouldnít ever see each other again, after tomorrow ­ if Iím sold way up on a plantation somewhere, and you somewhere else, and you somewhere else ­ always remember how youíve been brought up. and all Missis has told you; take your Bible with you, and your hymnbook; and if youíre faithful to the Lord, heíll be faithful to you."

So speaks the poor soul, in sore discouragement; for she knows that tomorrow any man, however vile and brutal, however godless and merciless, if he only has money to pay for her, may become owner of her daughter, body and soul; and then, how is the child to be faithful? She thinks of all this, as she holds her daughter in her arms, and wishes that she were not handsome and attractive. It seems almost an aggravation to her to remember how purely and piously, how much above the ordinary lot, she has been brought up. But she has no resort but to pray,  and many such prayers to God have gone up from those same trim, neatly arranged, respectable slave-prisons ­ prayers which God has not forgotten, as a coming day shall show; for it is written: "Whoso causeth one of these little ones to offend, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

The soft, earnest, quiet moonbeam looks in fixedly, marking the bars of the grated windows on the prostrate, sleeping forms. The mother and daughter are singing together a wild and melancholy dirge, common as a funeral hymn among the slaves:

"Oh, where is weeping Mary?  Oh, where is weeping Mary?  ëRived in the goodly land.  She is dead and gone to heaven;  She is dead and gone to heaven;  ëRived in the goodly land."

These words, sung by voices of a peculiar and melancholy sweetness, in an air which seemed like the sighing of earthly despair after heavenly hope, floated through the dark prison rooms with a pathetic cadence, as verse after verse was breathed out...

Sing on, poor souls! The night is short, and the morning will part you forever!

But now it is morning, and everybody is astir; and the worthy Mr. Skeggs is busy and bright, for a lot of goods is to be fitted out for auction. There is a brisk lookout on the toilet; injunctions passed around to every one to put on their best face and be spry; and now all are arranged in a circle for a last review, before they are marched up to the Bourse.

Mr. Skeggs, with his palmetto on and his cigar in his mouth, walks around to put farewell touches on his wares.

"Howís this?" he said, stepping in front of Susan and Emmeline. "Whereís your curls, gal?"

The girl looked timidly at her mother, who, with the smooth adroitness common among her class, answers ­

"I was telling her, last night, to put up her hair smooth and eat, and not haviní it flying about in curls; looks more respectable so."

"Bother!" said the man, peremptorily, turning to the girl: "You go right along, and curl yourself real smart!" He added, giving a crack to a rattan he held in his hand, "And be back in quick time, too!"

"You go and help her," he added, to the mother. "The, curls ma make a hundred dollars difference in the sale of her."

Beneath a splendid dome were men of all nations, moving to and fro, over the marble pavement...And here we may the St. Clare servants ­ Tom, Adolph, and others; and there too, Susan and Emmeline, awaiting their turn with anxious and dejected faces. Various spectators, intending to purchase, or not intending, as the case might be, gathered around the group, handling, examining, and commenting on their various points and faces with the same freedom that a set of jockeys discuss the merits of a horse.

"Hulloa, Alf! what brings you here? said a young exquisite, slapping the shoulder of a sprucely dressed young man, who was examining Adolph through an eye-glass.

"Well, I was wanting a valet, and I heard that St. Clareís lot was going. I thought Iíd just look at his" ­

"Catch me ever buying any of St. Clareís people! Spoilt niggers, every one. Impudent as the devil!" said the other.

"Never fear that!" said the first; "If I get ëem, Iíll soon have their airs out of them; theyíll soon find out that theyíve another master to deal with than Monsieur St. Clare. ëPon my word. Iíll buy that fellow. I like the shape of him..."

Tom had been standing wistfully examining the multitude of faces thronging around him, for one whom he would wish to call master... A little before the sale commenced, a short, broad, muscular man, in a checked shirt considerably open at the bosom, and pantaloons much the worse for dirt and wear, elbowed his way through the crowd, like one who is going actively into a business; and, coming up to the group, began to examine them systematically. From the moment Tom saw him approaching, he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he came near. He was evidently, though short, of gigantic strength. His round, bullet-head, large. light grey eyes, with their shaggy, sandy eyebrows, and stiff, wiry, sunburned hair, were rather unprepossessing items, it is to be confessed; his large, course mouth was distended with tobacco, the juice of which, from time to time, he ejected from him with great decision and explosive force; his hands were immensely large, hairy, sunburned, freckled, and very dirty, and garnished with long nails, in a very foul condition. This man proceeded to a very free personal examination of the lot. He seized Tom by the jaw, and pulled open his mouth to inspect his teeth; made him strip up his sleeve, to show his muscle; turned him round, made him jump and spring, to show his paces.

"Where was you raised?" he added, briefly, to these investigations.

"In Kintuck, Masír," said Tom, looking about, as if in deliverance.

"What have you done?"

"Had care of Masírís farm," said Tom.

"Likely story!" said the other, shortly, as he passed on. He paused for a moment before Adolph; then spitting a discharge of tobacco juice on his well-blacked boots, and giving a contemptuous umph, he walked on. Again he stopped before Susan and Emmeline. He put out his heavy, dirty hand, and drew the girl towards him; passed it over her neck, and bust, felt her arms, looked at her teeth, then pushed her back against her mother, whose patient face shoed the suffering she had been going through at every motion of the hideous stranger.

The girl was frightened, and she began to cry.

"Stop that, you minx!" said the salesman; "no whimpering here ­ the sale is going to begin." And accordingly the sale began...

Tom stepped upon the block, gave a few anxious looks around... and almost in a moment came the final thump of the hammer, and the clear ring on the last syllable of the word, "dollars," as the auctioneer announced his price, and Tom was made over. He had a master.

He was pushed from the block; the short, bullet-headed man, seizing him roughly by the shoulder, pushed him to one side, saying, in a harsh voice, "Stand there, you!"

Tom hardly realized anything; but still the bidding went on ­ rattling, clattering, now French, now English. Down goes the hammer again ­ Susan is sold! She goes down from the block, stops, looks wistfully back ­ her daughter stretches her hands towards her. She looks with agony I the face of the man who has bought her ­ a respectable, middle-aged man, of benevolent countenance.

"Oh, Masír, please do buy my daughter!"

"Iíd like to, but Iím afraid I canít afford it!" said the gentleman, looking, with painful interest, as the young girl mounted the block, and looked around her with a frightened and timid glance.

The  blood flushes painfully in her otherwise colorless cheek, her eye has a feverish fire, and her mother groans to see that she looks more beautiful than ever before...

The hammer falls; [our bullet-headed acquaintance] has got the girl, body and soul, unless God save her.

Her master is Mr. Legree, who owns a cotton plantation on the Red River. She is pushed along into the same lit with Tom and two other men and goes off, weeping as she goes.

The benevolent gentleman is sorry; but then, the thing happens every day! One sees girls and mothers crying, at these sales,  always!  It canít be helped, etc., and he walks off, with his acquisition, in another direction...

On the lower part of a small, mean boat, on the Red River, Tom sat ­ chains on his wrists, chains on his feet, and a weight heavier than chains lay on his heart. All had faded from his sky... all had passed by him, as the trees and banks were now passing, to return no more. Kentucky home, with wife and children, indulgent owners; St. Clare home, with all its refinements and splendors... the proud, gay, handsome, seemingly careless, yet ever-kind St. Clare; hours of ease and indulgent leisure ­ all gone! And in place thereof, what remains?

It is one of the bitterest apportionments of a lot of slavery, that the Negro, sympathetic and assimilative, after acquiring, in a refined family, the tastes and feelings which form the atmosphere of such a place, is not the less liable to become the bond-slave of the coarsest and most brutal ­ just as a chair or table, which once decorated the superb saloon, comes, at last, battered and defaced, to the bar-room of some filthy tavern, or some low  haunt of vulgar debauchery. The great difference is, that the table and the chair cannot feel, and the man can; for even a legal enactment that he shall be "taken, reputed, adjudged in law, to be a chattel personal," cannot blot out his soul, with its own private little world of memories, hopes, loves, fears, and desires.